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ABSTRACT

An anthropological examination of the impact of globalization on education in the Arab world reveals that education is standing on uneasy middle ground between the Westernization of educational structures and philosophies and the preservation of national and local customs and traditions. The transformation of education from a means to acquire a father's trade to a commodity in the global market system is most obvious among the upper socioeconomic classes. Because today's high-paying jobs require international travel and communications and awareness of technological advances and their application in the workplace, education is losing its role as a national integration machine and becoming a derivative of the global market, which may be characterized as follows: English-based, deterritorialized, and reliant on analytical skill and the problem-solving skills and dexterity needed to react to constant flux and change. Case scenarios of Beiruti teenagers studying at American schools in Lebanon illustrate that, although international schools and universities are increasingly exposing the Lebanese teenagers who attend them to Western culture, these schools cannot transcend their local and national environments, which formulate the "hidden curriculum" for student learning. The case scenarios also demonstrated that students appropriate foreign cultural forms in context-specific ways, which makes them creators of a new culture. (Contains 18 references.) (MN)

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Crossroads of the New Millennium

Education Between Globalisation And Local Culture: A World Without Frontiers For Students Without Traditions?

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Workshop 2

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Abstract

Bringing an anthropological perspective to bear on the issue of globalisation and its impact on education, this paper argues that globalisation should not be regarded as a top-down development only, one that gives global organisations and businesses the power to redefine national and local customs and traditions. More appropriately, globalisation should be seen as a process that requires active adaptation and assimilation on the national and local levels, resulting in hybridisation and the spread of cultural diversity. In the realm of education in the Arab world (and beyond), we note a Westernisation of educational structures and philosophies, especially among the socio-economic elites, who sent their children to foreign language schools and universities. The "dangers of deculturalisation" and the education of a generation of "strangers" in their own country has been bemoaned by adult analysts. However, even international schools cannot transcent their local and national environments, which formulate the "hidden curriculum" for student learning. In addition, students appropriate foreign cultural forms in context-specific ways, which makes them creators of a new culture.

Education between Globalisation and Local Culture: a World Without Frontiers for Students Without Traditions?

It is the purpose of this paper to bring an anthropological lens to bear on the intersection of three seemingly divergent and contradictory forces: globalisation, local culture, and education. Beginning with a definition of the three terms, the paper gives a brief overview of the relevant literature on globalism as threatening or promising force. The subsequent section explains anthropological method and usefulness in the study of the challenges that educators and students face in the new millennium, followed by brief case scenarios. Based on field research in Lebanon, where I worked as a high school teacher in an international school, 1997-98, my findings show how students perceive, negotiate and appropriate the divergent forces in their everyday lives, as they move through different "continua of cultural space" (Fernandez 1986). It is my contention that the intersection of the global and the local in the life of school-age teenagers can result in creative culture production: students use global vocabulary in formulating meanings and commentaries about the world around them. In the process, they localise the global.

GLOBALISATION VERSUS LOCAL CULTURE: AN UNFAIR COMPETITION?

Globalisation, a term that appeared in the English language dictionary for the first time in 1961, has been defined "the process of increasing interconnectedness between societies such that events in one part of the world more and more have effects on peoples and societies far away" (Baylis and Smith 1997: 7, 14). The fact that the world is interconnected is not a late twentieth century discovery: trade links between communities have been the norm ever since communities organised themselves into socio-political entities.[1] However, the process of globalisation is a qualitatively new phenomenon, as "social relations acquire relative distanceless and borderless qualities, so that human lives are increasingly played out in the world as a single place" (Scholte 1997:14). What transforms the world into a visibly singular place has to do with worldwide patterns of production and consumption. Agents of

[1] It has been argued that the emergence of organised communities has been an outcome of travel and trade links. For instance, Clifford states, "Cultural centres, discrete regions and territories, do not exist prior to contacts, but are sustained through them, appropriating and disciplining the restless movement of people and things" (1997:3).

globalisation are multi-national corporations and international organisations, and their goal is an uninterrupted flow of goods and information, as diverse as CNN news, McDonald's hamburgers, Hollywood movies, Nike shoes, investment money, or World Bank loans. As this list indicates, most of the products originate in the United States, although many of the component parts are produced and assembled elsewhere. What makes us feel global are images of foreign countries that look like home, as well as the immediacy of reaching friends, family, or business partners around the world via telecommunications devices. A fax sent from the United States reaches the United Arab Emirates before I can take it to my next-door neighbor. Globalisation, in addition to its distanceless and borderless qualities, collapses time: our actions are instantaneous. We have forgotten what it means to wait for a letter to arrive.

Exactly these three characteristics -- distance, borders, and time -- pertain to our understanding of local culture, which can be defined as "the experience of everyday life as lived by ordinary people in specific localities" (Watson 1997: 9). This experience of everyday life is a space of relative homogeneity, where individuals subscribe to, or at least recognise, common tenets of child-rearing practices, education, marriage rules, life stage ceremonies, morals or values. Local culture is never uniform, as personal status and gender, as well as ethnic, professional, and other stratifications result in different degrees of involvement in communal activities. However, if asked to identify the most prominent features of their community, most members would be in agreement on the rituals and practices, despite their individual opinions about them. A local culture requires boundaries that set it apart from others. Boundaries are often drawn via marriage or trade rules, in addition to fences and actual border crossings. The borders set up spatial, and, more importantly, cognitive distance between peoples; it is not necessary for a person to live across a fenced border to be considered "different" or "other." Sometimes, a person can live in the same household, but still be considered an outsider. The third element that defines local culture is a specific sense of time. The understanding of the past is arranged differently in diverse locales, allowing for unique origin myths, ancestors and genealogies, important historical battles and victories, which result in stories that members of a community share. It is through these stories that communal sentiments get established. As the elders tell children about their ancestral heroes, or as they organise commemorative festivals and rituals, sentiments of group cohesion and membership are constituted.

According to these definitions, globalisation and local culture seem to be diametrically opposed forces, the first resembling a forceful stream intend on flooding the second, rendering it unrecognisable. Local cultures, in this image, are lowlands whose protecting dikes are increasingly demolished. Indeed, it has been argued, that globalisation will profoundly change the way individuals, communities, and nations interact (cf. Reich 1991; Waters 1995). As early as 1964, with the onset of the technological revolution of the twentieth century, McLuhan warned of the pernicious effects of the innovations that were entering everyday life, comparing the rapid introduction of new media and technology in our lives to "huge collective surgery carried out on the social body with complete disregard for antiseptics" (McLuhan 1964: 64).

But is the story really that simple? Lately, it has been discovered by anthropologists, who are the experts in small-scale community studies that the local is not about to disappear as the gloomy predictions of the past had said (cf. Appadurai 1996; Hall 1991). Global forces have to undergo a "localisation process" before they are accepted into the community. In other words, our simplistic picture of globalisation needs refinement. While there are certainly global changes, which dictate, to a certain degree, what people wear, eat, read, and watch, a fine-tuning of our analytical lenses can reveal a more nuanced picture of processes of hybridisation, instead of homogenisation. People choose to accept or reject global goods and ideas, following their own, culture-specific agendas.

EDUCATION: STANDING ON UNEASY MIDDLE GROUND

Education in its current version of student enrollment in subsequent grades of educational institutions can be defined as modernist project. As a byproduct of industrialisation and nationalism, schooling superseded previous methods of teaching, for instance, the apprentice system or age group initiations. The governments of new European nation-states appropriated the educational enterprise as a tool of homogenising, integrating and controlling the populace, turning them into citizens who knew and followed the laws, entered the work force in an orderly fashion, and joined the military if called to defend the country (Gellner 1983; Green 1997: 131-136). The new education system was then exported, in the wake of colonial governments, to all parts of the world, where it was actively embraced as means to economic growth and development (Christina, Mehran, and Mir 1999: 347). At the present, the differentiation of education into primary, intermediate and secondary schooling, to be followed

by higher education on the university level has become a universal classification system. The idea of testing and grading are also universal, as are, from the student perspective, the fears of failing. This strictly regulated education program is closely linked to national policy-making, and the ministries of education worldwide are entrusted with the task of producing skilled, knowledgeable citizens, who will dutifully participate in national economic, political, and cultural pursuits. Education thus defined is uneasily lodged between the forces of globalisation and local culture, as it wants to shield itself against the former, and dominate the latter.

It is not without irony that national education at the turn of the millennium faces a similar conundrum as local cultures have throughout most of the past century, after governments decided to turn education into a "massive engine of [national] integration" (Green 1997: 134). There is no denying that the role of education, or, more specifically, the adult expectation of what education is supposed to accomplish, has been affected by global developments. Whereas education in the past was a means to acquire the father's trade, or a specific body of knowledge, education has become the instrument to hone professional skills. Globally, parents want their children to become doctors, engineers, lawyers, and business people, and schooling is considered to be a guarantee for financial security. Not without reason do parents tell their children to take school seriously, as it is their "investment in the future." Education has become a commodity in the global market system, which is most obvious among the upper socio-economic classes. Parents are willing to pay substantial tuition fees to ensure their children's access to social networks and quality teaching which will lead to "success," defined in monetary terms. Today's high-paying jobs require international travel and communications, and an awareness of technological advances and their application in the work place. Thus, education loses its role as national integration machine, and becomes a derivative of global market needs, which are English-based, de-territorialised, reliant on analytical skill, problem-solving capabilities, and the dexterity to react to constant flux and change.

THE END OF LOCAL CULTURE? STUDYING THE ISSUE THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL WAY

While globalisation's impact on education cannot be denied, it is not entirely clear how globalised education impacts local cultures. If we believe scholars like Waters, who stipulates that the "determining principle of culture is the medium by which it is transmitted,"

we might well expect an end of local culture (1995:34). With the revolution in communications technology, and the daily use of the internet, cable TV, beepers, cell phones, faxes, e-mail, etc., local cultures seem to face fundamental transformations. We can (and usually do) evaluate these developments in two ways:

1. We regret that people have begun to consume identical goods all over the world and spend more time with electrical appliances than with other human beings, while 2) we hope that the communications revolution will bring the world closer together to form a "global village" of shared values and ideas. On the other hand, we can turn to anthropologists like Appadurai, who claims that "globalisation is not the story of cultural homogenisation" (1996:11). He argues that very few cultures can lay claim to uncontaminated authenticity, since culture contact was the norm across the ages, and not the exception. Coining the terms "technoscape" and "mediascape," he then describes how new media and technology enable communities to preserve local culture across boarders, as migration, displacement, and diaspora increasingly become shared human experiences. For Appadurai, position 1) is not to regret, but to welcome the technological innovations, which allow for building and maintaining communities across long distances. As for position
2. Homogenisation of values is considered to be impossible: rather than creating a unified global culture, media and technology promote trans-local communities.

In order to substantiate their claims, anthropologists use oral or textual ethnographic evidence, collected by conducting "participant observation," which means spending a year or more among a chosen community to see and partake in their daily routines. In my case, it meant settling in the "Westernised" part of Beirut, called Ras Beirut, which is home to the American University, as well as a few foreign language private schools. From all the individual neighborhoods in the city, Ras Beirut is a prime example of hybrid local culture. Stores, restaurants, and billboards cater to a bilingual clientele, as Western fast food chains line the street closest to campus, alongside more traditional *falafel* and *manaouche* stores. People speak Arabic and English, code-switching at ease, as they talk into cell phones, eat a

quick lunch, or chat with friends on the sidewalk.[2] Ras Beirut, I was told repeatedly, was not typically Lebanese, which made it a perfect research site for questions regarding an endangered local culture demolished by the global. In such terrain, I should not be able to find many traces of "Lebaneseness."

I taught and spend time with Lebanese teenagers and their families, who had returned to the country after the civil war ended in 1991. After spending a considerable part of their young lives abroad, mostly in international schools, these young Lebanese are prime informants on issues of globalisation, education, and local culture. Having returned to a country they are expected to consider "home," these students are self-consciously engaged in "becoming Lebanese" within and against their international upbringing and, in some cases, many cross-border moves. In their position as "outsiders," they vocally and critically comment on the different local and national socio-political structures and events, which define their daily lives. What follows are two case scenarios to illustrate the kinds of behaviour and opinions I encountered among young Beirutis in the classroom and in more informal setting around the school.[3] I hope to show that Lebanese students are adept in categorising different zones of cultural influence, using their knowledge and mastery of global culture as a way to express their local concerns.

SURFING THE INTERNET: LOCAL USES AND ABUSES OF GLOBAL TECHNOLOGY

One day after class, Ahmed tells me, interrupted by bursts of laughter, how he "met" a vampire in a chat room, someone who claims to be 3000 years old, yet only 34 in his current lifetime, and who has the gift of giving eternal life. Ahmed was one of my students in Beirut, who spent much of his free time "chatting" on the internet. Of course, he clarifies right away,

[2] Traditionally, language and culture have been seen as synonymous phenomena, as the former was thought to express the latter. This view is reflected in the plea for Arabisation in Middle Eastern schools (cf. Massialas and Jarrar 1991). However, in light of the realities of migration, displacement, travel, and commercial exchanges across borders, culture has become more detached from language concerns.

[3] In my work, I assume education takes place inside and outside of classrooms: the time spent with peers has as much, if not more, influence on teenagers, than the time spent with teachers. I therefore privilege the informal over the formal education setting in this short paper. For more classroom examples, please consult my forthcoming dissertation (Volk 2000).

he mostly uses the computer to e-mail his friends abroad, and he has many as he lived in Saudi Arabia and the United States before returning to Lebanon with his parents and siblings. Ahmed also uses the internet to do his homework assignments. One week, I assigned a research project on presidents of different Arab countries, and Ahmed brought me a several page long essay on Ghaddafi. Since he had not bothered to reformat the margins, I could easily identify the source of his "work," and called him on it. This was not the research project I had had in mind. "But Miss, we don't have up-to-date books in our library here, I had to go to the web! And it took me hours to find this one site. There is soooo much stuff on that guy...." Looking at it this way, Ahmed had done research, just not book research. I asked the rest of the class who had used the computer for the assignment, and more than half of the students raised their hands. "Miss, books are outdated."

It has been argued that since students today spent many hours daily using new communication technology, a significant part of their learning takes place in front of a screen (Gopnik 1999). And as teachers were commenting, when I brought up the topic in the teachers' lounge, at least students are reading as the internet keeps them interactive. This was seen as an improvement over TV. That evening, I drew up a short questionnaire, asking how many hours a day students spent with their computers, TV, or reading.[4] It turns out that students who own a computer play computer games daily, either alone, or with friends. Almost all of the students, however, use e-mail several times a week, those without computer access at home going to one of the many internet cafés. They were mostly e-mailing friends or family abroad. Hasan, for instance, came up after class to tell me that an uncle of his had compiled all of their family members' e-mail addresses into one big address list, and as a consequence, he was receiving up eighty messages a day, "Eighty messages, Miss!", from his extended family all over the globe. He said, even his parents were spending hours on the computer these days, replying to the incoming messages. Which is why the house's phone lines were continuously tied up. So the only way he could communicate with his friends in Beirut was via his cell phone. Which he also used to send e-mail messages.

Rula spends much of her allowance and free time on chat lines in the Web Café next to the American University. She says, she loves to meet new people that way. Depending on the time of day, she will connect with Australians, Europeans, Americans. People identify themselves by their real or made up names, which they use continually. Rula has become a "regular" in a chat group. "I meet a lot of freaks, of course, but I just don't reply." She says that once she tells the chat group that she is Lebanese, she will often get inquiries if she looks like the TV announcers on LBC International, a Lebanese TV station which broadcasts to other Arab countries. She says, she does not respond to those messages. She vividly remembers the time when she was in a chat room and found out that one of the group was Israeli. So she re-logged herself into the chat room as "terrorist" and got into an argument about Arab-Israeli politics. "Miss, you had just taught us about the White Papers and stuff, so I had to show off what I had learned!" Rula smiled. "In the end, I had half the customers at Web Café stand around my terminal participating in the debate. That was fun!"

Ahmed complained to me another day that his friends were using e-mail too much. "I run into them on the street, and they ask me, 'Did you read my e-mail yet?' Instead of just saying it right there." Somewhat annoyed, he then has to go to his computer to find out what his friends wanted to say. Indeed, his patterns of social interaction have changed dramatically ever since he got his own cell phone and his computer station in his room. But the different uses of the internet by different students makes it hard to come to generalisations about how internet culture has affected "Lebaneseness" or local life. Students make use of the internet to complete homework assignments, learning to navigate the global information highway, while finding shortcuts to completing assignments. They talk with strangers, freaks and vampires, but they also stay in touch with relatives abroad. They get to know people elsewhere and tell them about Lebanon. In conversations with students, I got the sense that they see the internet as a tool of entertainment as well as learning. Does this pose a challenge to classroom teaching styles? Indeed. Does it abolish the local? Not necessarily. By logging in as "terrorist," my student ironically mirrored the Western media depiction of Arabs, localising her identity to initiate an internet discussion. Most of the internet encounters

[4] Consult my forthcoming dissertation for a detailed evaluation of the answers. Usually, the TV was on all day long in the family living room, and students tuned in and out as they were doing their homework. Reading

become funny stories to share with friends locally. In most e-mail cases, messages are sent to inform the recipient of personal and local news. With so many Lebanese living all over the globe, the internet becomes a techno-scape that allows for regular communication.[5]

POP CULTURE LOCALISED: SECTARIAN SENSITIVITIES AND RAP

In their senior year, a group of students started the WSDC, the West Side Druze Connection. Already a group of friends, not all of them Druze, they assumed a *nom de guerre* that indexed the American rap artist Tupac Shakur, who was killed in 1996. Based in California, Tupac Shakur had been in competition with East Coast rap artist Notorious B.I.G., who got killed in 1997. The two singers represented the East Coast and West Coast camp of American rap artists. They fought for years over which side played the most authentic rap, who of the two was more "down," which means grassroots, black. "It's all about the West Side" or "East Side" became part of the rap lyrics and the vocabulary of their respective fans. When both artists were killed (by still unknown killers) the public declared them victims of the West Side-East Side war. Other rap artists began to call for a "truce" and the mothers of both victims met in a much publicised reconciliation meeting. In 1998 Beirut, according to my student Nabil, it was the Druze "who thought they had a connection with the West Side." Their "enemies" were the members of the MP, *Mesihi* [Christian] Power.

The part of Lebanon's civil war that was fought in Beirut was a war between Christian neighborhoods in East Beirut and Muslim neighborhoods in the West, which then became a metaphor for the entire civil war. Mapping the conflict between Tupac and Notorious B.I.G. over authenticity of rap onto the Lebanese civil war, the students replayed their own country's sectarian conflict with the vocabulary of popular international culture. Just as Tupac and Notorious B.I.G. showed disrespect to each other in their songs, the students made fun of each other's sectarian particularisms. Nabil explains:

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books, magazines, or newspapers took a distant third place.

[5] Of course, the internet has a price. Web Cafés charge between US$ 3 and 6 an hour, phone bills can amount to US$ 300 a month if several family members use the net. Which means that only a certain class of people makes use of this tool of global culture.

> "so everybody that was Druze would get on the case of people who were the Mesihi Power... everyone who was Christian got MP written on their locker and Muslims got the WSDC sign. And the Druze would put chips in the Christian lockers, you know, like when you go to church, you get the Eucharist, so they were kind of saying, oh, you're getting *Fantasia* at church, like the cheap Lebanese chips. And we'd say, oh, the United Colors of Benetton, cause they got their five color star [a Druze religious symbol], like you don't know anything about your religion.... it was all these dumb jokes.... "

While the West Side-East Side scenario was a way of recontextualising and distancing themselves from "Lebanese reality," their joking practices were unmistakably close to home. Dropping chips in lockers, or referring to religious symbols, the students were not just clowning around. This was all about whose side you were on. But Nabil reassured me several times, "Miss it was a joke! We'd do it to someone and then laugh about it together and we'd all be going to class. Nobody took it seriously. We just had fun." Lama commented, "Miss, these guys are just so immature." Nabil retorted," Come on Lama, you were laughing too, at the time." Lama concedes, smiling. Nabil turned to me again, saying, "And you know, Miss, at other schools, they take this stuff seriously. We were just joking."

The joking mode, as well as the rap conflict mimicry, constituted a frame of reference that granted the students immunity from criticism or punishment. Using the East Side-West Side conflict of rappers, the students formulated a blunt and biting commentary of Lebanese sectarian particularism, a commentary about dying for your side in a meaningless act of violence. They do so at a time when adults are silent about the war, when they say, "*Khalasnaa min l-harb*" [we left the war behind], meaning that they want to move on with their lives. On the other hand, the students are able to express their concerns about the world around them. They do it at a time when the government optimistically espouses new solidarity among the Lebanese. But the students point out the cracks in the optimistic discourse of reconstruction of their elders. In the space of ambiguity opened by the joke, they affirm that much is left unsaid and unsettled in post-war Lebanon.

CONCLUSION

Living in a country under reconstruction, facing political and economic uncertainties, and having to claim a national identity that they, for the most part, did not grow up with, young returnee Lebanese have a difficult task ahead of them. Being labeled "you're not pure Lebanese" by peers who stayed in the country during the war, my students used tools and content of global culture, to express their local concerns, and fulfill local expectations. In my classroom, I had several discussion with my students about the effect that their foreign language education has on their "Lebaneseness," which, in each case, sparked a fierce debate between the "functionalists," who considered an English language education instrumental to their future career opportunities, and the "traditionalists" who believed it endangered a rooted sense of self. The discussion often ended with accusations back and forth about who ate burgers and who ate *manaouche* for lunch. In other words, the students implicitly stipulated that culture is based on the choices individuals make. And they sometimes choose traditional and sometimes foreign foods in the school cafeteria, placing their order half in English, half in Lebanese Arabic; they use e-mail to reconnect with family or to reach out to unknown audiences, they spend weekends with friends in pubs in Beirut, or with family in their mountain homes. This does not mean that the students are confused or conflicted. It means that they take their local culture into the global arena. In the process, they create their own Beiruti post-war youth culture.

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